



## Office of the County Executive

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# Manitowoc County Courthouse 2022 Dome & Facility Improvements Study Frequently Asked Questions

- Can you describe this project briefly?
  - This project is three projects in one.
    - Dome Repair & Restoration
    - Window Replacements
    - HVAC System Replacement
  - All are necessary
  - Timeframe from project approval to completion: 3 Years
- What is this project all about?
  - This project is the 3<sup>rd</sup> phase of a building envelope renovation plan put into effect after a Historic Structures Report was commissioned in 2004.
  - The 1<sup>st</sup> phase replaced the low slope roof, the copper balustrade level of the dome, the three sets of exteriors stairs, and the addition of an accessible ramp to the east entrance.
  - The 2<sup>nd</sup> Phase repaired and replaced failing mortar ( tuck-pointing ) on the entire 4-story stone façade of the building
  - This last phase is the renovation of the clearstory level and exterior dome cladding, renovation of the interior dome, replacement of the 120 exterior windows of the building, and the replacement of the 50+ year old HVAC components and controls.
  - A detailed listing of the Scope of Work and its associated costs can be found in the 2022 Strang Architects Study on the County's website:
    - [StrangArchitectsDomeFacilitiesStudy.pdf \(manitowocountywi.gov\)](#)

- **Why was Strang Architects picked to perform the study?**
  - Strang was chosen as their Senior Preservation Architect was the architect on our 2010 project that was Phase 1 of our Building Envelope Restoration projects. His work on that project was exemplary, he is well aware of the condition of the Manitowoc County Courthouse, and he is renowned for his work on historic structures.
- **What was the cost for the Strang Architects Study?**
  - \$39,900 and the funding was included in the 2022 Budget.
- **Why did this Project come up now?**
  - This is the final phase of the 3-Phase project and has been planned for some time. The repairs and renovations need to happen in the near-term, and now is the time before there are unexpected failures.
- **What if we do nothing?**
  - While we are not in a dire situation to start this project, the existing conditions demand attention sooner rather than later and now is the appropriate time, before we have any major issues. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, and it will not be less expensive to do the work 5 years from now.
- **Why is this renovation/repair project so expensive?**
  - This is a monumental building and this will be a monumental project that is expected to take two or more years to complete. The pool of qualified contractors who are capable of this work is small. The cost estimates in the 2022 Strang Architects Study were based on worst-case scenarios of what may be found once the existing cladding is removed. The rationale to budget sufficient funds is sound; prepare for the worst and hope for the best.

- Do we have to replace the windows and HVAC equipment as part of this project?
  - The existing windows are 45+ years old, no longer energy-efficient, and are starting to fail. They are an integral piece of the building envelope. The HVAC system, both the mechanical equipment and the control system for it is at least 50 years old and is in need of replacement. We contemplate completing all the projects during the same construction timeframe, but bidding them out separately to allow local contractors the opportunity to bid on these elements of the project.
- What percentage of the \$25 to \$30 million budget is assigned to each part of this project? (Dome Repair, Windows Replacement, HVAC Replacement)
  - In general, the project budget can be assigned this way:
    - Dome: 70%
    - Windows: 15%
    - HVAC: 15%
- Why do you want to do the window replacements and HVAC projects at the same time as the dome repairs; can't it be put off?
  - The 45+ year old windows are part of the building envelope and are starting to fail. The HVAC system is 50 years old, fairly inefficient due to its age and older-technology control system, and in need of replacement. Bundling these projects and completing them at the same time will limit the upheaval of construction for people visiting the courthouse as well as our employees into one timeframe. From a financial standpoint, the sooner we make these energy efficiency upgrades, the sooner we'll realize the energy savings and lower our costs. From a practical standpoint, systems this old are at the end of their life-cycle and must be replaced and this is an opportune time to do it.

- **Why did you go back to the original window design?**
  - The original windows were made to fit the masonry openings. When they replaced the HVAC systems in the 1970's they lowered the suspended ceilings in the offices to add ductwork, and put in metal panels to cover the space that would have been open above those suspended ceilings. With vast improvements in glazing materials we can open up the windows to full height again and achieve great energy efficiency while allowing more natural light into the office spaces. Some of the suspended ceilings will need to be raised immediately in front of the windows to create a "light well". This method is already being used in several areas with good success. The building façade will return to normal and the occupants in the offices that get greater light will benefit, all while maintaining great energy efficiency.
- **Can't you just fix the copper and dome instead of replacing it?**
  - The existing copper cladding is 116 years old and at the end of its service life. In many cases, there is nothing left to solder to, or to make a water-tight repair. The steel super-structure behind the copper cladded clearstory and stainless steel dome need some repairs, but the extent is unknown at this time so we are planning for the worst-case scenario of extensive corrosion and the need for major repairs.
- **I heard they want to replace the stainless steel dome with glass. Why is that?**
  - The original dome was glass, and replacing it with a modern durable polycarbonate glass would restore the dome to its original appearance. It is anticipated the cost to replace with glass or copper is about the same.
- **How long will the dome repairs last?**
  - At least 100 years, if not longer.

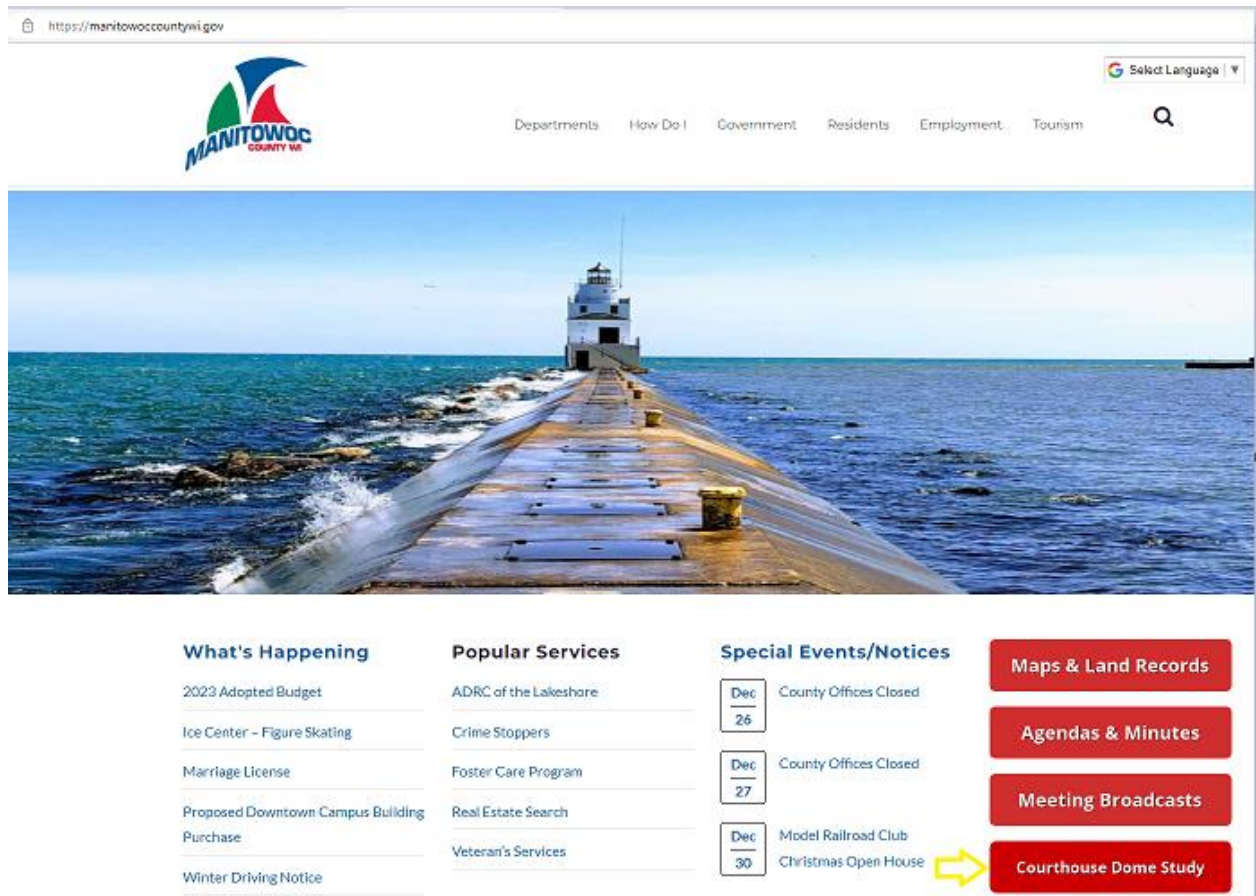
- **I heard the roof has leaked from the day it was built, is that right?**
  - To some extent it is, though those leaks were confined to the exterior of the copper-clad low-slope roof and not the dome itself. Historical records detail leaks on the copper-clad low-slope roof that have been addressed over the years. In 1972 (50 years ago) the original copper-clad low-slope roof was replaced with an EDPM “rubber” roof and that ended the leaks. The low-slope roof was re-roofed in 2010 as part of Phase 2 of our Building Envelope Renovation Plan and should not need re-roofing again until approximately 2040.
- **Why don’t you just cut the dome off the courthouse and be done with it?**
  - The dome is a part of the overall steel super-structure of the building and integral to the building’s structural integrity.
- **Wouldn’t it be less expensive to build a new courthouse?**
  - The current courthouse is 59,000 sq. ft. and houses much more than just the courtrooms, with the following courts and office suites making up the 59,000 sq. ft.:
    - (3) Branch Circuit Courts with a 4<sup>th</sup> Branch being added in August 2023
      - All the support offices, Judge’s chambers, and jury rooms for all (4) Branch Circuit Courts
    - The B-15 Intake Hearing Room and waiting rooms
    - County Elected Official Office Suites
      - County Clerk
      - Clerk of Courts
      - Treasurer
      - District Attorney
      - Victim/Witness Holding Room
      - Reg. of Deeds
    - County Department Office Suites
      - Child Support Agency
      - Corporation Counsel
      - Reg. in Probate
      - Family Court Commissioners
      - Drug Court
      - County Executive

- A conservative sq. ft. cost estimate for a courthouse building would be \$500/sq. ft. for a total cost of \$29,500,000
- There would also be land acquisition fees, architectural design and engineering fees, and site improvement fees that could easily run into the \$3-\$5 million dollar range. There would then be demolition costs for the existing building and site restoration costs that could easily be in the \$2 million range.
- Total Cost for a new Courthouse could easily top \$37,000,000
- Lastly, there would be the cost in lost history and civic identity, which you cannot put a price on.
- If this project happens, where will the money come from?
  - At this time we are considering a one-time property tax increase of approximately 5-6% of the County portion of a taxpayer's property tax bill. This would pay for the building over a 20-25 year period and equitably put the burden not just on one generation of taxpayers, but on future generations that would have use of the courthouse.
- If we go the property tax route, how much more will the average taxpayer have to pay in property taxes to fund this work?
  - Approximately \$25 - \$30 per \$100,000 of property value for 20 to 25 years.
- Aren't there other funding options?
  - We can fund this project with either a County Sales Tax or the Property Tax via borrowing.
  - The "one-half of a percent" local option Sales Tax will generate approximately \$7 million to \$9 million dollars a year. This will take 4 to 5 years.
  - If we borrow the money and pay with the property tax, it will generate the payments with a one-time \$25 to \$30 increase on a \$100,000 property, or about a 5% - 6% one-time increase in the county property tax for 20 -25 years, which amounts to a one-time 1.5% to 2.5% increase in the total property taxes.

- **Why do you prefer the Property Tax option over the County Sales Tax option?**
  - The Sales Tax will cause “Long Term Harm” to address a very “Short Term Need”.
  - We could enact the sales tax for a limited time. However in the past once a sales tax is implemented, it’s historically hard to cancel it.
  - Local government borrows at a federally subsidized rate because the interest received by the bondholders is “tax exempt”. Local government gets a much lower rate than the market rate.
    - This gives us quite an advantage to borrow “long term”
      - We don’t borrow at the “prime rate”; that is a “short term” business rate.
      - Long term rates in mid-January 2023 are 3.5% - 3.8% per P.M.A. Securities L.L.C.
  - We are in a good position financially. Manitowoc County has very low debt. We have done this before. We borrowed \$15 million dollars in 2010 to rebuild our radio system, built the Joint Dispatch Center, held the line on taxes, and still have very low debt now.
  - Think about the burden on the taxpayers. With the sales tax you are concentrating the burden on a limited number of taxpayers for 4-5 years. With the property tax via borrowing you are spreading the burden over more taxpayers for 20 - 25 years.
  - This project is a “once in a century” project. It will last a long time. The property tax allows us to spread the cost equitably over time to taxpayers who will use the Courthouse in the future and not just today’s taxpayers.



- Are there grants available for this type of project?
  - There may be and we are investigating all opportunities. However, to be conservative we cannot rely on them and need to plan for having to fully-fund this project.
- I ask my neighbors about this project and they say they don't know anything about it. How do I or my neighbors learn more about this project?
  - We have been fully transparent about this project from the outset.
  - All meetings regarding this project have been advertised, open public meetings
  - All documents regarding the project are posted on the Manitowoc County Website with the link on the home page:
    - [www.manitowoccountywi.gov](http://www.manitowoccountywi.gov)



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[www.manitowoccounty.org](http://www.manitowoccounty.org)